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SUBJECT: POLLING: DEMOCRATIC BLOC PARTIES STILL LEADING  
NATIONALISTS ON EVE OF ELECTIONS

#### SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) Most observers and pollsters give the Radical Party an edge over the Democratic Party in the contest for the top vote-getter in Sunday's elections, although two respected Serbian polling agencies for the first time since 2003 have give the DS higher political ratings than the SRS. Prime Minister Kostunica's DSS places a strong third in all major surveys, while G17 Plus is the only party of the four remaining contenders that looks virtually certain to make the five-percent threshold. Turnout, which is projected to be between 50-60 percent, is likely to determine whether the Socialists and Ceda Jovanovic's LDP make threshold, with lower turnout favoring SPS and higher turnout favoring LDP. Kostunica may be counting on the G-17+ and 6-7 minority party seats to give him enough bargaining power to remain prime minister. DS officials, however, hope to outpoll the DSS and its allies to place them in the driver's seat in coalition talks. It seems unlikely that any coalition emerging from these elections will espouse a fundamentally different position on Kosovo than the current government. End Summary.

#### FINAL PREELECTION POLLING NUMBERS

¶2. (SBU) Twenty election lists will be on the ballot when Serbian voters go to the polls on Sunday, including six representing ethnic minority parties. Of the 14 parties subject to a five-percent threshold necessary to earn a place in parliament, however, only three--the Serbian Radical Party (SRS), Democratic Party (DS), and the coalition led by the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS)--are guaranteed to cross the threshold and only four others appear to have a fighting chance of doing so, according to the latest survey results from Serbia's most respected polling agencies.

	SCAN	CeSID	SMMRI	Gallup	Avg.
SRS	27	26	30	29	28
DS	31	30	26	24	28
DSS-NS	16	19	18	19	18
G17+	6	8	8	7	7
SPS	5	6	4	6	5
LDP+	5	5	5	5	5
SPO	4	4	3	4	4

¶3. (SBU) The Scan and CeSID polling results are notable for marking the first time since 2003 that a party other than the Radicals commands the highest political ratings in Serbia. Even high-level DS officials, however, have expressed strong doubts to Poloffs about their chances of outpacing the Radicals on Sunday, and both Strategic Marketing (SMMRI) chief Srdjan Bogosavljevic and Medium Gallup chief Srbobran Brankovic are convinced that the SRS's dedicated electoral base and campaign surge since

Orthodox Christmas will be enough to beat the DS.

#### TURNOUT CRITICAL TO CHANCES OF SMALLER PARTIES

14. (SBU) Of the four other main contenders, pollsters agree that Mladjan Dinkic's G17 Plus is almost certain to cross the election census and Foreign Minister Vuk Draskovic's Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO) has only a slim chance of doing so. Dinkic by all accounts has conducted the most focused, energetic, and effective campaign, while Draskovic has largely failed to overcome the perception that a vote for his party is a wasted one. Ceda Jovanovic's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) coalition has seen its prospects suffer from a surging DS campaign and less exposure granted to the coalition's campaign by Serbia's media.

15. (SBU) Pollsters generally have been surprised at the degree to which the coalition bringing together the United Pensioners Party and Nebojsa Covic's Social Democratic Party (PUPS-SDP) appears to have siphoned off votes from the Socialist Party and put the SPS at risk of falling short of the five-percent threshold. Brankovic and Scan's Milka Puzigaca both expect the SPS to make it into parliament if turnout does not exceed 55 percent, as they both currently project, but the SPS's chances are dim if turnout reaches 58-60 percent, as Strategic Marketing and CeSID project. Bogosavljevic believes that SPS leader Ivica Dacic's 3.6 percent showing in the 2004 presidential elections are a more accurate barometer of the SPS's current chances than the party's 7.6 percent result in the 2003 parliamentary elections, since the party can no longer rely on their traditional voters' loyalty to the late Slobodan Milosevic.

#### MINORITY PARTIES

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16. (SBU) Six out of the 20 election lists represent ethnic minority parties, which only need to cross the "natural" threshold of 12,000-16,000 votes per deputy seat, depending on turnout. The Republican Election Commission also granted these parties a lower threshold of required signatures--3,000 instead of the minimum 10,000 demanded by the election law--to make it onto the ballot. This controversial decision may face a legal challenge by Josef Kasa's Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians (SVM) if its co-ethnic competitor, the Hungarian Concord coalition, passes the natural threshold, since the SVM is the only minority party that obtained 10,000 signatures. In addition to these two Hungarian parties, Sulejman Ugljanin's Bosniak List for Sandzak (LZV), the Coalition of Albanians of the Presevo Valley, and two Roma parties--the Union of Roma of Serbia (URS) and the Roma Party--also are on the ballot.

17. (SBU) Kasa has stated publicly that he would be disappointed if he does not earn at least four deputy seats, while Ugljanin is unlikely to win more than two seats and the ethnic Albanian list will be lucky to win more than one seat. Ugljanin's archnemesis, Rasim Ljajic, chose to piggyback on the DS election list, in exchange for guarantees that his Sandzak Democratic Party would get at least three parliamentary seats. The two Roma parties' chances are far more uncertain, given the traditional factionalization of Roma politics, the high abstention rates of Roma, and the tendency of the vast majority of Roma voters to support the major Serbian parties, including the Radicals.

#### POST-ELECTION CALCULATIONS

19. (SBU) It is possible that the votes of the minority parties will be necessary to secure a parliamentary majority for Serbia's new governing coalition and will be critical in determining whether President Tadic or Prime

Minister Kostunica has the upper hand in coalition negotiations. The DSS is supporting, to varying degrees, the SVM, LZV, and URS campaigns, so even if DS significantly outpaces the DSS, Kostunica appears to be counting on the 6-7 seats that these three minority parties are likely to gain and G17's support to give him sufficient bargaining power to retain his position as prime minister. Bogosavljevic, who regularly advises the DS, warned that a parity of seats between DS on the one hand and DSS and G17 on the other could be a formula for stalemate in coalition negotiations and even increase the risk of repeat elections.

¶10. (SBU) Tadic's deputy chief of staff Branko Radujko told us, however, that the DS will be in the driver's seat in coalition talks as long as the total number of seats gained by the DSS and SRS does not reach 126 seats, which represents a parliamentary majority. Although DSS officials have told us privately that they have no intention of exploring a coalition with the Radicals, they have refused publicly to exclude the possibility apparently in order to maximize the party's leverage in future coalition talks with the DS. The SRS has publicly ruled out a coalition with the DSS.

#### COMMENT

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¶11. (SBU) The latest poll results reaffirm that a DSS-DS government is the most likely coalition emerging from Sunday's parliamentary elections. Negotiations will depend on the final seat count in an election in which it is almost impossible to predict final numbers. The latest polling is within the margin of error on whether the Socialists, the SPO and the LDP cross the five percent threshold, a critical factor in the final distribution of mandates. In any event, negotiations to form a government will not be easy and could drag on for several months.

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